

The Life of the Spirit

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TWO NOVEMBER PILGRIMAGES

I. PADRE PIO

By

PEREGRINA.

The thought that I might have passed W.O.S.B. and have gone to England, and the thought that—had my officer not postponed my L.I.A.P. by a fortnight—I would have missed this chance of a life-time (I'm being posted to Klagenfurt after L.I.A.P. and shall thus not be returning to Italy, fills me with horror; and I will try to remember this next time I'm disappointed about something, because *my* plans don't work out quite according to *my* ideas—and I shall remember that in that case they will work out better.

It all came about like this. We were suddenly given Monday, 12th November, off duty for the commemoration of Armistice on the 11th, which was a Sunday, and we would therefore be free in any case—or have the half day at least. So I started talking to a girl, who had a boy-friend in Foggia, trying to find out what the possibilities of transport were. Well, the girl said there was hardly any transport on the road, that there was nowhere to stay in Foggia as there are only officers' clubs up there, that the district was badly bombed and desolate, and that the whole scheme was most inadvisable without transport, but if one had a car one could make it in four to five hours. Well, I got terribly excited at the thought and talked to my Irish friend Rita, and we started scheming. So we put in for a sleeping-out pass to Foggia, and said transport had been arranged. We felt sure we'd get there, if we were meant to; one does not usually have ideas like this, if God does not want them to be realised, so the only logical conclusion to come to is to leave things in His hands. As we had no idea where we were going to stay the night, we carefully avoided the question of accommodation, and just hoped it would not be noticed.

The next day I was called into the platoon office, and informed I could not have my pass, unless I produced a chit signed by an officer to say that transport had been arranged. Well, I thought we'd had it then, because, being privates, we have no command over cars—nor have we any boy friends who have transport of any description. So I started to ring up British and American transport companies frantically, in the hope that someone was going up to Foggia with two spare seats in transport of any description whatsoever. But no luck. I left my address and telephone number, thinking: I'll have to be sensible about this, and if it does not work out, I must not be childish and pout. Rita got no transport either, and I could hardly expect an officer to sign a chit falsely (now that my nearest officer friends have been posted away—and you can't expect a stranger to do that sort of thing for you).

Then the next day someone, whom I had not rung up, rang me and said he had a jeep going back empty to Taranto via Foggia, and what time did we want to go, as the driver could go at any time one of these days.

Well, it did not take me long to say we wanted to go on Sunday at 1 o'clock from the palace information booth, and thank him very very much. As a girl was supposed to have transport back on Monday, Miss Jacobson signed my chit, and Bob was our uncle, and Charlie our aunt—we got the pass. The question of accommodation was mercifully overlooked—we said we were going to visit friends, so they must have presumed we were staying with them. Which was perfectly correct—with the minor detail that we did not know them yet, but we were quite sure we would be friends the minute we met. In the evening we found out that the girl had already left for Foggia, and so we could not ask her for a lift back, but we were quite sure that God would not leave us in the lurch, and so we looked forward feverishly to Sunday.

Sunday morning, before Mass, I went to Confession, because I wanted to be clean for the occasion of visiting a man, who will most probably be canonised after death—as you know, the Church never proclaims a man a saint while he is yet alive and always makes the most stringent examinations and tests even then. But there are only two people at the moment who have received the wounds of Our Lord—Padre Pio in Foggia, and Therese Neumann in Konnersreuth, and saint or no saint, it is a miraculous gift and sign of great grace from God, and would teach us about Him and bring us nearer to Him—and that is worth anything, even not getting back and being put on a charge!

Sunday afternoon came along—Rita had bought up half the Naafi, as we had no idea if we would be able to get any food anywhere, and we filled our water bottles with drinking water, be-

cause most Italian water is polluted and undrinkable. As we had just had a typhus inoculation, we felt quite safe, wherever we would have to stay the night. Just before we set out, it poured with rain—it was a very cold day, and we waited at the information booth equipped with ground sheets and I in Wellington boots, in the mistaken belief that Wellingtons keep your feet warm. I had my shoes in our kit bag. Well, it was one, it was half past one, and no driver, no jeep. Rita was standing at another corner, just in case the driver went there, and just when I was going to her place to ring up the officer who was supposed to have got us the transport, the jeep arrived, and Rita arrived at my post just as I arrived at hers and we missed each other beautifully. She soon came round to where I was and she had been, and we got into our transport—an open jeep! At least, it had a canvas roof, but it was not the sort of day for an open jeep, if you see what I mean! However, we were only too grateful to have anything, and what is even pneumonia compared with seeing Padre Pio! From then on I felt sure we would get there, and that Padre Pio definitely wanted to be visited by us. The driver was a nice English boy, who had taken an officer to Naples and was on his way back to his unit.

It stopped raining for us nicely, but the wind almost cut us in half. Rita was sitting in front, I had the whole back to myself—and Rita gave me her scarf. We pulled our ground sheets round our feet, and kept our destination in front of our eyes, and had great fun laughing and describing to each other what we were expecting to find in the way of accommodation. The driver must, at first, have thought us quite mad, but in the end he probably got infected too, as we explained things to him, and we all got along famously.

The ride to Foggia is extraordinarily beautiful—right across the country along fairly good roads lined with trees and through hills, over bridges and little rivers that perhaps become bigger rivers when there has been a lot of rain. We went through Benevento and Ariano to Foggia. In Benevento we passed a whole lot of boys studying for the priesthood—they must have been out for their afternoon constitutional, and enjoyed the fact that it had stopped raining. I said my rosary, and Rita probably did too—always a good way of keeping oneself and one's car safe in Our Lady's hands on a journey which, as all journeys in Italy, is or can be quite dangerous—because the Italian and American drivers are not known for careful driving, and the fact that none of the Italian donkey, mule, ass, bullock, or horse-carts are lit up at night does not improve matters on bad roads in the hills.

Well, we got colder and colder and happier and happier as we neared Foggia counting the kilometres, and eventually landed up

in the Naafi in Foggia. Never have I been so grateful for a cup of Naafi tea. We warmed up quickly, and also had some food and bought some for breakfast just in case we could not get any wherever we would be staying the night.

The R.A.F. Chaplain, who had been to see Padre Pio, gave me the name of the village where Padre Pio lives and said there was an American lady there who had become a Catholic, and who had lived up there for years now, also that there was an Italian count who spoke English perfectly, and that there was a guest-house where we could put up, but we did not know if things had altered since he was up there. The name of the village where Padre Pio lives in that Cappuchin monastery, is San Giovanni Rotondo—and I was told it was just outside Foggio up a little nasty hill. The driver said, we'd never get up there on our own, and as he had nothing particular to do, he offered to take us up. Uff, sigh of relief. So we looked for the Manfredonia Road, which was supposed to lead to the monastery. We kept asking people for the way, they all knew of Padre Pio and said the place was 12, 16, 19 km. away, which we did not believe, and just as well, otherwise we might have given up. Every little slope in the road we came to I said, Ah this must be the hill—little did we realise it was 12 miles outside Foggia. Once we followed two chaplains in an open 15 cwt.—you know how it is, you go somewhere, and you feel everybody else must be going there too, particularly chaplains! We soon realised our mistake, laughed, and turned round.

We went up along this road, stopping every so often, and asking at one of the probably government-built houses—they all look alike and have an even portion of land around them, are called 9 O.N.C. or 58 O.N.C., always a number and then O.N.C.; they had all been D.D.T.'d in Spring this year, so perhaps they are free from vermin!—and asked for San Giovanni Rotondo—that is, when there were dogs barking, Rita came back and we tried the next house, as it was quite dark by now, and after all farmers do keep dogs to bite strangers, or at least bark and keep them away! Once we turned on to an airfield, and I had a suspicion that we were on the runway and not on the road, but there were so many potholes in the road, that we thought in the end, it could not have been a runway after all. In the finish it lead us back to the road we had started from, to the same Negro camp that had told us to turn right on to the air field. So this time this very kind and obliging Negro fished out an Italian boy who came and sat next to me and said he would show us the way. We soon found out he did not know the way either, but at least he knew where we were going, and could do all the knocking at other people's houses, which he did very obligingly.

We did not feel the cold at all now, the monastery seemed

right round the corner, and we were full of excitement and expectation. We turned off the main road on to a pretty bad road—no other transport in sight, no people, no houses, no animals. Stones, gnarled old shimmering olive trees, poplars, and nothing else. Eventually we came to my "nasty hill"—it was a mountain all right, an awful road, winding round and round it, the place getting more and more lonely, but we knew this was the right road, and that we would get there if we went on for long enough. The driver was an absolute model of patience—after all, what interest had he in getting two mad A.T.S. girls to a place they did not know! But he said it was a pleasant change from driving officers, and that he enjoyed himself and did not mind in the least—so we said no more. Oh, I forgot, we ran out of petrol half way and had to return to the nearest Negro camp in the hope of getting some. Now you know what happens if you try to get petrol out of an English camp: you see the guard who gets the orderly corporal who gets the orderly sergeant who gets the orderly officer who sends you to the transport officer who wants to see your work ticket, driving licence and what not, and then eventually perhaps decides to give you what you want. Well, this Negro boy just said: *Yooo have no gasoleeeen*—well, I think I can help you, it's right over there. The Italian boy came off the jeep and helped pump, and once more, in next to no time, Bob was our uncle and Charlie our aunt, we were wished good luck and set off again. By this time our driver had realised that there was no earthly chance of our getting transport back to Foggia in the morning, so he offered to call for us, and asked if he could put up in the Negro camp at night—'Shoor, he would be only tooo *welcum!*—Wonderful, wasn't it or wasn't it?

Well, we set off again, and got up the hill this time without any further hitches. We got into another village, where we asked once more for the now quite famous San Giovanni Rotondo—and a little boy said he knew Padre Pio, and would show us the rest of the way. So he climbed on, but of course he could not go without his cousin, so his cousin climbed on too. By now we were three English and three Italians in the jeep—and I must add that none of them stole anything, which in itself was quite remarkable enough without anything else! We eventually reached the top of the mountain, passed a restaurant (that must have been the hotel the padre in the R.A.F. mentioned) and then rode up a road that had the stations of the cross along the side. So I knew we were there, and that the end of the road would be the monastery. And so it was. The monastery looked white in the moonlight, we tumbled out of the jeep, and the two little boys showed us the way to the American lady's house, knocking at the gate and shouting: *Maria, due signorini inglesi* (or however you spell that). Out came a round, middle

aged motherly woman. We said, was she the lady who spoke English? She said she was, and asked us inside. A warm room with a kitchen stove, a long table around which several women sat holding rosaries in the hands—they are Franciscan tertiaries and must have met for prayer—and pictures of the Sacred Heart and of Padre Pio on the wall. We soon explained, and asked if we could stay the night. No, we would not rather stay at the hotel. Yes we'd love some tea! So we dumped our kit and ourselves, the driver went back with the Italians whom he had given some chocolate and cigarettes, according to their ages, and he promised to call for us the next morning. As we had expected, the women were not in the least bit put out or surprised at our coming—they must be used to that sort of thing. We soon thawed, and had some brown bread, a spread of cheese cum butter, some raw ham, and felt beautifully at home. One of the women went upstairs to make up our beds, and then we talked. We were the first A.T.S. girls who had been up there, there had been nurses, and what I think must have been Waafs, lots of British and American army, but no A.T.S. When I happened to mention I was born in Germany, the lady next to me said she came from Munich! So we talked German, very much to each other's delight. Maria, the American lady, understands German, so I was not being rude, and in any case, they enjoy other people's enjoyment, and do not say: now I wonder if they're talking about me! The German lady's name was Katherina, she had married an Italian, and has now lived in San Rotondo for years. Maria became a Catholic with Madame Montessori, with whom she toured Europe for ten years before she met Padre Pio—she too stayed near the monastery after that. Well, we arrived there about half past eight or nine, and we talked till about twelve. Mainly about Padre Pio.

He was, as monks do, praying in front of the crucifix one day (20 Sept., 1918)—and the monks found him in a faint. He awoke with the stigmata of Our Lord. At first he tried to hide them, but did not, of course, succeed for very long. There is a crust of coagulated blood over the wounds in his hands, feet and side, but they bleed continuously around the edges. He describes the pain as that caused by the boring of nails. He was once asked: "Does it hurt, Padre?" And he laughed and said: Do you think Our Lord gave them to me as a decoration? His hands are covered with brown mittens normally, and are only uncovered whilst he celebrates Mass. The next morning we would be able to be there! Padre Pio starts Mass at quarter past five in the morning, and it takes him an hour and a half, or longer, to celebrate—as compared with the usual half hour.

There was a little Italian girl Maria told us about, who had had appendicitis one winter, but—as conditions medically are

so poor in Italy—the doctor would not operate until the spring. So the girl was in awful pain, and the mother kept beseeching Padre Pio to heal the child so that the operation would not be necessary. One night the little girl dreamt Padre Pio came to visit her. He showed her his bleeding hands and his feet, and the wound in his side, and then said: Now show me where your pain is. He then proceeded to cut around the diseased part, and said, come, let us go to the church and finish the operation there. So he took her by the hand, and there was a whole procession of people following them; but Padre Pio became smaller and smaller, and no one was able to see him. In the church he finished the operation, cut the diseased part out, sewed the wound up—and when the little girl awoke, there was no swelling, no pain, no disease, and she was cured for good.

One time Maria's mother came to visit her—and on a certain date Maria said to Padre Pio, my mother will by now be in Rome. No, said Padre Pio, she is in Umbria, and he maintained that she was there and not in Rome. A few days later Maria had a letter from her mother, saying: Please thank Padre Pio for the visit he paid me while I was sick in Perugia (Umbria) the other day. She awoke quite all right and fit again.

Katharina said, next to Jesus Christ, Padre Pio is the most wonderful thing the world has ever had. He is always present with his spiritual children, and protects them when they call upon him in the hour of danger. As for instance, in the case of a woman who was in a foreign country and stopped someone in the street to ask where the nearest money-changer was, as she did not have the currency of that country. The man said not to bother about a bank, he would change the money for her if she would follow him to his house. But when they arrived, he locked the door behind her and she became very frightened and silently implored Padre Pio for help. Suddenly the expression of the 'bad man' changed to one of abject terror, he moved backwards towards the door, opened the door without even turning round, and let her out without a word. She never knew just what it was the man had seen.

In one district there were a lot of thieves about, and one woman prayed to Padre Pio to be preserved from them. One night she heard his voice saying: Get up, the thieves are at the gate. And when she sounded the alarm, sure enough, the thieves were at the gate. She had been woken up just in time.

People often come to Padre Pio to ask about vocations—he told one man he would become a doctor, and what's more, a surgeon, and the man had never even considered surgery or medicine. But he acted upon Padre Pio's advice and applied for entry at college, and will start his studies soon.

He now only hears confessions in Italian, but he used to in all

languages, though he speaks none of them. People used to speak their language and he his, and they used to understand each other perfectly all the same. In dreams he speaks to people in their own languages, and also knows when people dream about him. For instance, once he was asked if such and such a thing was true, which someone had dreamt of him, and he said: Why should I say it was so, if it were not true.

Many are the stories of people who came to visit him from afar off. As of the very French lady who was lolling about in his presence as if she was in a sitting room amongst admirers, and said she would not go to confession in the church, but only in the sacristy. All right, said Padre Pio, you shall—when I call you. One day he called her into the sacristy and she was in there for a long, long time. When finally she came out, she was rather a different person. White as a sheet, and in tears, and not at all the *mondaine Parisienne*, saying: Il est cruel, il est terrible, and she would never come to San Giovanni again, the roads were bad, the beds were hard (they aren't), the food was bad, etc., etc. But she came back, just could not stay away.

Stories come of people who ask him if they will be able to come again, and when, and it always works out just so. Once a girl was very upset because her holidays had been divided into two, so that she would not have enough time to get to Padre Pio, and also the fare was too high to be paid out of her meagre salary. So she prayed and prayed and prayed, and one day her boss called her into the office and decided to give her her holidays all in one after all, and her sister said she had just got some money she did not need and sent it to the girl, so she was able to come to San Giovanni after all, within the time Padre Pio had said she would be back there.

The other day some people had already been on the road for three days in order to get to Padre Pio, and prayed that he would help them, and he appeared to them and said: Do not worry, you will get to me to-morrow—which they did.

Maria told us of a girl whose only word of Italian was 'prego' (please), so she came to Padre Pio, and just said 'prego, padre', putting absolutely everything into the word 'prego'—and, of course, they got on very well.

We heard all this, and much more, and kept telling each other that we had really managed to get here! One of the most phantastic of our dreams coming true, two days that were going to leave the most profound impression upon our lives, and we prayed that this experience would bear fruit in us. But in the end even we could take in no more, it was near midnight, and we decided bed was indicated if we were to be up before five the next morning.

We had a little room to ourselves with two beds and snow-

white linen, a crucifix on the wall, a picture of the sacred heart and one of Padre Pio. We heard twelve o'clock strike, and I asked Rita if one said the Angelus at midnight, or only during the daytime. She said one can say it at night, but usually one isn't awake. So we said it together, and then tried to sleep. I never can sleep when I am very happy, no bad conscience, sickness, tiredness or anything else can keep me awake, but when I'm very happy I stay awake for a long time and then only sleep very lightly and keep waking up. Great fun, waking up and wondering how near five o'clock it was, and thinking of all that five o'clock entailed. But I did sleep a bit—the bed was comfortable and we were warm.

At five Maria woke us up, and we had a wash that was more a lick than a promise. The bathroom was perfectly civilised, but the water icy-cold, straight from the mountain I should think.

As we knew where the monastery was and Maria was not quite ready, she told us to go on in advance. We stepped out into a crisp cold night, the stars were crystal clear and very bright in the black-blue sky, and the moon was like a small sharp sickle and very beautiful. We hurried our steps in excitement. The air smelt of Christmas.

One last deep breath and silent prayer—and we entered the church. Padre Pio was just giving the Benediction after Holy Communion, which on weekdays is given before and during Mass for the benefit of people who have to go to work. There he stood, at first with his hands upheld, then went on to make the sign of the cross slowly over the whole community.

Introibo ad altare Dei—I will go unto the altar of God, to God who giveth joy to my youth.

The little church was almost filled with villagers, devoutly (this is most unusual in Italy) kneeling, silent, and the women had their heads covered. The church was very simple, almost primitive, it was clean and homely in the greatest sense of that word.

We went forward slowly and knelt with the rest, time stood still.

When Maria arrived, she shepherded us right to the front of the church, so that we would be able to see. I knelt in the archway, that is the entrance from the side and leads to the altar, so that I had a perfect view, and Rita was in the front with the rest of the congregation. The men were right inside the sanctuary, around the altar itself, but the only time a woman is allowed there is during nuptial Mass (so if I marry, I have that great joy still to come). But I was only theoretically outside the sanctuary, i.e. about a foot further away than the men. I'm sure it was all right, otherwise someone would have soon prevented me, and Maria would never have put me there in the first place.

After the *Confiteor* Padre Pio stepped up to the altar—very gently and painfully and full of deep love. Then a great silence before the Introit.

This Mass was so wonderful: how can I describe it? Real intercourse with God, great silences between the prescribed prayers, silences that were so vivid—My Lord, I come to Thy altar, I, so unworthy, am offering up Thy Body and Thy Blood just as Thou didst at Calvary. Laden with the sin and burdens of mankind I beg of Thee, O God, to accept this offering of Thine only Son through the medium of my hands. Hands bleeding with the wounds of Christ, offering up the unbloody Sacrifice, one so near Christ offering up Christ Himself—with trepidation, intimate love, holy fear and great humility, radiant with love, entirely self-effaced. Feeling for and with Christ the great suffering he underwent at the Cross, calling down again upon mankind the great grace which has since streamed to us through His wounds. Often the words came haltingly and with an almost super-human effort.

The lights failed during the consecration of the Host—but a monk soon lit more candles, and then we no longer felt obliged to follow Mass in our missals, but were able wholly to concentrate on the altar. At last a Mass celebrated slowly and so fully, that one did not continually have to shake oneself and say: Now I wonder where he's got up to, and then find you've almost missed the consecration.

Et ne nos inducas in tentationem—the words were full of horror of ever not following God's wishes, full of the humble prayer never to permit him to go astray. And then the server's response: *Sed libera nos a malo*.

Then the breaking of the Host, most gently, in half, and then a fraction taken off one half, "May the peace of the Lord be always with you"—and Our Lord's Body glides into the Chalice of His Blood, as a sign of the Resurrection, Triumph over the death symbolised by the separation of Our Lord's Body and Blood in the separate consecration.

Lamb of GOD, Who takest away the sins of the world . . . Have mercy upon us, grant us peace.

Soon the priest's Communion, and then ours. Slowly Padre Pio walked along the altar rails, made the sign of the cross over each communicant with the host before placing it on his tongue: *Corpus Domini nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam tuam in vitam aeternam, Amen*. Lest more attention should be fixed on his stigmata than upon Our Lord Whom he was bringing to us, he took great pains to pull the sleeves of his vestments over his wounded hands, so that they were hidden.

Finally the blessing: *Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus* (and the sign of the cross), *Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus sanctus. Amen*.

Then the prayers after Mass, and Padre Pio left to make his thanksgiving, and left us to make ours—how could we ever make an adequate thanksgiving, even had we all our lives to do so! It was about seven o'clock. Maria went to ask the Superior for permission for Padre Pio to speak to us before he started to hear confessions. Would permission be granted? A princess was refused the other day, but then she was Italian, and could go to Padre Pio in the confessional, and would also have the chance to come again, which we might not have.

Another priest came up to the altar and gave Holy Communion to his altar boy.

Then another priest (Maria said he was the Apostolic Delegate, sent specially from the Pope to look after Padre Pio) celebrated Mass—but oh, how painful it was to watch him. I know, Holy Mass is Holy Mass, but we kept looking at his hands and wondered what on earth was wrong with them—until we realised he had not got the stigmata. From now on something will be missing from all other hands for us—almost the essence of the being of hands, and the hands that are pierced are the only ones that are whole.

About ten to eight, Maria beckoned to us to come outside and we went into the side entry to the monastery, knocked and asked for the Father Superior in order to get permission to see Padre Pio. Previously a village girl had come up to me and offered her place in the confessional for us, to enable us to speak to Padre Pio, not realising that our Italian was not nearly good enough for that, and she now followed us, incredulous that we might get permission which had been refused a princess.

While we waited a priest in a black cloak swept past us and we were told he was a Hungarian priest carrying the Blessed Sacrament to Padre Pio's father, who is almost paralysed in the legs and lives in Maria's house. Padre Pio's mother died in her house some time ago. Maria fell to her knees out of reverence for the Blessed Sacrament, but we did not, as we did not know. She explained afterwards.

Then the Superior came out of a door in the corridor—a kind old man with a long beard and a smiling kindly face—and he granted us permission to see Padre Pio.

How this reminds me of all the Indian legends I have heard, of ladies travelling to visit a Saint—and we realised how very privileged we were to be able to see him privately, and how greedy to expect more than to be able to partake of his Mass.

The door leading into the Chapel opened, and there stood Padre Pio. In his simple brown habit, wearing brown mittens, he stood there, radiant and relaxed, now the strain of celebrating Holy Mass was over. How can I describe him—he is the most lovable man you could possibly wish to meet. His bearded face

shone with radiant love—so much so that you could not see the features of his face distinctly. He stood simply and inwardly straight, waiting. Rita had learnt a little sentence in Italian off by heart, which she now, bold as you please and much to her own amazement—rattled off: “Padre, please pray for all my family and for all Ireland”. He gave us a huge smile and readily agreed to do so. I said, the same for me, please, and for all my friends, and what I did not say I thought, and then it comes to the same. Maria introduced us (what a blessing it was to have her) and Padre Pio blessed us and said, “May God keep you from all harm and all evil, always”—and when he heard I had come out of Germany because of Hitler, he laughed and said, Yet things had gone well in spite of him in my life. We held out our rosaries and missals for him to bless. We kissed his hand and he placed his other hand on our heads in turn, we knelt down and received his blessing. Then he went into the church, and shortly after another monk came out and brought us two miraculous medals he had blessed especially for us. And our hearts laughed.

Outside the monastery we met an old man and the young girl we had seen before, and the old man asked if he could come to Foggia in our transport. We said, certainly, and then the girl said she was just going to confession and would also ask Padre Pio if she was to go to Foggia to-day or to-morrow, and if it was to-day, could she come too. But she did not turn up again, so I presume Padre Pio had decided it was the wrong day for her. It seems he is the spiritual, and otherwise, director of the entire village.

We walked back to Maria’s house, fell to our knees as the Hungarian priest returned from taking the Blessed Sacrament to Padre Pio’s father.

Then breakfast: hot black coffee, brown bread, the cheese cum butter mixture, peanut butter—and lots of talk, fun and laughter.

Maria said that Padre Pio’s wounds never heal and never fester, but when he had an ordinary operation near his ear, it healed perfectly normally, or even more quickly than with other people.

She also told us that under the fascists she had had to leave her house for three or four months, and that on her return she told Padre Pio that she had not missed one morning’s Holy Communion during her absence. Yes, said he, nor have you for three or four years now—and when she came to think back, she found that that was indeed true.

About Therese Neumann and Padre Pio, Maria said: Woe to the world if these two people pass on without the world realising what it had in them, and who had been living amongst it. Therese Neumann, she said, enacts the passion when in her

trance, goes through the way to Calvary, the carrying of the Cross, and when she is being nailed to the Cross blood begins to stream from her wounds, and she has the mystical death—her heart actually stops beating for long times at a stretch. The only food she has taken for twenty years is Holy Communion, which she receives daily. Padre Pio does eat, though sparingly, but when he was indisposed for a few days he did not eat for three days, yet put on weight—all of which goes to prove that man liveth not by bread alone! But in Padre Pio we have something more than in Therese Neumann, as his hands are consecrated to the priesthood and he can offer the sacrifice of Holy Mass.

Then it was nearly time to go—we left a few things for Maria and Katharine on the table near our beds, as we knew they would not accept any money for their hospitality. We were absolutely showered with holy pictures and with photographs of Padre Pio—they could not give us enough. I also saw Padre Pio's handwriting! Katharina showed it to me, without my even thinking I'd like to see it!

We met the English-speaking Count who gave us best regards for the R.A.F. padre, and then our driver turned up, and we had to tear ourselves away.

Oh, I forgot to tell you, that the last thing Maria said to Padre Pio was, would he please pray for transport for us, because we had to get back to Caserta that day, otherwise we would get into trouble, and that we had no transport after Foggia. This he promised to do.

Just before we left we met an old lady, who had married an Italian, but came from Cumberland, and she was thrilled to hear that I had been stationed in Carlisle. She spends several months in the year up at San Giovanni Rotondo in order to be near Padre Pio. I promised to write to her sister while I am on Liap.

Then the old man boarded the jeep with us, and off we went, stopping at the photographers on the way down—and the stations of the cross saw us on to the road down into 'civilisation'.

To me the wounds of Padre Pio were not wounds of terrifying pain and agony foremost, but rather of such concentrated love and grace, that they could not be frightening in that other sense. They exuded such a sense of absolute dependability and security and infinite understanding and deep rest! "I believe . . . in the Communion of Saints" has become much more vivid to me.

It was a glorious morning. None of the bad weather of the day before, also it was much warmer, the sun was shining, the air was clear and clean, the colours vivid, and we traced our way back to Foggia, recognising the landscape by shapes, but now seeing the colours added. Round and round the mountain—downwards, on our left the Adriatic—hills, trees, fields making camouflage or patchwork patterns. Back past the Negro camp

(and let no one talk against 'Blacks' in my presence!) and on to the main road lined with poplars. White houses marked O.N.C.

The old man got off just outside Foggia in case an M.P. should choose to make trouble, as civilians are not allowed to ride on W.D. transport.

We reached the Naafi, which had not yet opened. Rita went across to a lorry driver to enquire if he happened to go our way. The *first one* said he was going to Naples via Caserta, and how many were there of us! (Oh, it's quite impossible to get a lift back from Foggia. I would not dream of attempting it if I were you!).

So after we had got some tea for our jeep-driver and wished him all the best, and tried in vain to thank him adequately, we set off and rosaried our way back, and arrived in Caserta about 4 o'clock—just in time for a most welcome cup of tea.

And now we will always be homesick for San Giovanni Rotondo.

II. PABBAY OR THE ISLAND FATHERS

By

PEREGRINUS.

It took an hour and a half in the fishing boat driven by its small paraffin motor. Jonathan, the fisherman, sitting on the box covering the engine, said it was the most perfect day for the trip; as calm as it could ever be, and November was already a week old. Everyone that morning had said it was calm: the parish priest, the man who drove us to the harbour from the north of the island at 8.15 prompt, the man at the store who had known the weather of the Islands for nearly 70 years, for them all it was a miracle of fine weather. This is an important point; for although the boat was of the size that normally takes trippers out into the Channel at Brighton, and although Jonathan's son dextrously steered into the waves so that we never once were splashed, the boat did toss. Jonathan on his perch moved to the rhythm of the waves, but we, his two passengers leaning against a cross-beam two yards away, were alternately looking down at him and peering up at him; and once or twice we were flung brusquely against each other. The sensation was that of a boat swing. This was to be expected. The sun was out, and had been ever since we had first arrived at Castlebay; for fifteen minutes we had peered out under its rays just over the horizon to catch the first glimpse of Jonathan's boat coming round the point from the island of Vatersay. But here we had the Atlantic on one side of us and the Minch on the other, so that the waves met from the mainland thirty miles to our left and from Newfoundland 3,000 miles away on our right. On our return, too, we